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AUTHOR Parkerson, Annette H.
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ABSTRACT

The effects of participation in extracurricular activities on young women's career and educational development were examined. A constant comparative method was used to analyze the open-ended responses to questionnaires completed by 156 high school girls and the transcripts from semi-structured interviews with 5 female college freshmen and 2 young adult women who were in the work force. All seven women volunteered to be interviewed because of the positive nature of their high school extracurricular experiences. The analysis established that girls participate in extracurricular activities primarily for personal, social, physical, and emotional reasons. Relatively few of the high school girls believed that their educational and career development was being directly affected by participation in extracurricular activities. The most common reasons given by the high school girls for participation in extracurricular activities were "need for college applications" and "need for scholarships." The young women interviewed credited participation in extracurricular activities with increasing their motivation for school and enhancing their awareness of career options. It was therefore recommended that parents and teachers encourage girls to become involved in extracurricular activities, particularly sports, at an early age. (The bibliography lists nine references. The interview protocols used for adult women participants and first-year undergraduates are appended.) (MN)

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A. Parkerson

Young Women's Career and Educational Development through Extracurricular Activity Participation: A Qualitative Study

Annette H. Parkerson

Arizona State University

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For more information, please contact the author by email at ahatcher@imap1.asu.edu or at the following mailing address: Annette Parkerson, Division of Psychology in Education, ASU Main, Box 870611, Tempe, AZ 85287-0611

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Abstract

The processes through which extracurricular activity participation ("EAP", Marsh, 1992) affects young women's career and educational development were explored. A constant comparative method (Merriam, 1996) was used to analyze open-ended questionnaire responses from 156 high school girls and semi-structured interview transcripts with 5 first-year female undergraduates and 2 young adult women. Questionnaire data revealed that girls participated in extracurriculars primarily for personal, social, physical, and emotional reasons. Interview data illustrated how these reasons subsequently affected career/educational development, such as by increasing motivation for school and enhancing awareness of career options. The findings suggest the importance of parent/teacher encouragement and the need to increase girls' early extracurricular opportunities, particularly sports.

Prior research documents the positive influence of extracurricular activity participation ("EAP", as coined by Marsh, 1992) on a myriad of outcomes, such as higher educational expectations (e.g., Holland & Andre, 1987) and lower rates of high school dropout (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Overall, extracurricular activities appear to promote students' personal, educational, and vocational development (Holland & Andre, 1987). The problem lies in the lack of evidence regarding the *processes* through which these desirable effects occur. Even with longitudinal designs (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999), previous research has only been able to document that positive outcomes result from extracurricular activities, but not why or how they occur. There is a need for more qualitative work in order to understand the processes involved in extracurricular activity participation (Miller, Barnes, Farrell, Sabo, & Melnick, 1998).

Another limitation to the EAP literature is that girls have been under-studied. Research has been limited to "white, male, high school senior athletes" (Marsh, 1992, pg. 553). This oversight is unfortunate as certain activities, such as sports, may increase girls' confidence for non-traditional careers (Parkerson, 1999).

Thus, future research needs to include female participants and also seek to uncover how these processes occur. The present study addresses some of these problems by focusing on the perceptions of young women who are or who were active in high school extracurricular activities. In particular, this study explores the following questions: What processes initiate and sustain girls' EAP? What processes explain how EAP affects girls' career and educational development? What does EAP mean overall to young women?

Methods

Questionnaire Data Collection

One hundred fifty-six girls, including 34 girls from racial/ethnic minority groups, who ranged in age from 13 to 19 years, comprised the sample. The sample was drawn from three private, religiously affiliated high schools in an urban area of the southwestern United States. Participants completed a survey regarding their involvement in extracurricular activities and their career and educational expectations. Two open-ended questions from the survey were used in this research. Those questions regarded the reasons why girls participated in non-sport and sport activities. The questions were as follows: 1) If you participate in an extracurricular activity(ies), why do you participate? If not, why? 2) If you participate in a sports activity(ies), why do you participate? If not, why?

Interview Data Collection

Participants. Seven adult young women were recruited for semi-structured interviews regarding their views of their high school extracurricular activity participation and how such participation had influenced their lives. Five of the women were first-year traditional college undergraduates and the remaining two women were adult professionals. The adult professionals and one undergraduate were recruited through personal contacts. The remaining undergraduates were recruited through short talks with introductory English composition classes. None of the participants were paid.

The first year college undergraduates were "Marsha", "Christina", "Maria", "Elizabeth", and "Kerry", and the adult women were "Betsy" and "Bonnie". Marsha, Elizabeth, Kerry, Betsy and Bonnie were European Americans. Maria was Latina, and Christina was African American.

The women were U.S. residents from urban areas all over the country. All of the undergraduates were full-time students; Betsy was a clinical psychologist and Bonnie was a graduate student and former special education teacher. Kerry and Christina were 19 years old; Maria, Elizabeth, and Marsha were 18. Betsy was 31 and Bonnie was 32. Christina, Elizabeth, Betsy, and Bonnie were former high school varsity athletes whereas the other three had been active only in non-sport activities. Maria had played bass in a school orchestra, Kerry had participated in an intensive summer camp program, and Marsha had been the secretary of a school community service club. All seven women said they volunteered because of the positive nature of their high school extracurricular experiences.

Procedures. The interviews with the two adult professionals, Betsy and Bonnie, were conducted in the researcher's home by mutual consent. The college undergraduates were interviewed on a large university campus in private classrooms. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Short follow-up interviews were also conducted with Marsha, Kerry, Elizabeth, Maria, Bonnie, and Betsy in order to clarify questions and check understandings. With the exception of Bonnie whose follow-up interview was conducted in person, all follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone.

Measures. The two adult women, Betsy and Bonnie, were interviewed first using structured questions. (See Appendix A for specific questions.) The interviews focused on their perceptions of how their sports participation had influenced their lives and in particular their personal identities. The initial interviews lasted approximately one hour each and the follow-up interviews were between fifteen and thirty minutes long.

The college undergraduates were interviewed after the completion of the interviews with the adult women. Structured questions were used. (See Appendix B for the specific questions.)

The format of the interviews follows. Participants were first interviewed extensively about the extracurricular activity in which they considered themselves to have been most involved. Time permitting, students were also interviewed about their experiences in additional extracurricular activities, including service activities. Additional questions considered their views of EAP in general. Initial interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour and the follow-up interviews lasted approximately ten minutes.

Role of the Researcher

Although two professors reviewed the data collection and analysis process, I was the sole researcher. I conducted, transcribed, and analyzed all interviews. I also collected the questionnaire data and analyzed it as well.

Because of my active role in data collection and analysis, I must explain my own biases and background. My interest in this topic is personal as well as professional. Because of my positive experiences in high school extracurricular activities, I assumed that others would feel that way as well, and I anticipated finding "evidence" documenting the benefits of such participation. Even as a child, I felt that women and girls were often slighted in our culture. So when I learned that girls had been under-studied in this research (Marsh, 1992), I felt compelled to undertake this work. So two strong personal biases may be at work – my tendency to see extracurricular activities as positive and also my desire to expose areas where girls may be treated unfairly.

In order to keep my own biases from interfering with the data as much as possible, I made the interview questions open-ended in order to allow the participants to say what they felt, not what I wanted them to say. The college undergraduates I interviewed were strangers, not friends or acquaintances of mine, so that I was not seeking participants who would respond like I

would. Finally, I also tried to be open to responses that were completely different from what mine might be during the interviews as well as during data analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The open-ended responses regarding why girls participated in sport and non-sport activities were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). First, the responses were read several times to get a sense of possible themes. The themes were related to 1) physical development 2) social development 3) emotional development 4) identity/personal development and 5) career/educational development. Then the responses were categorized in terms of what aspect of girls' development was being influenced.

Although the original intention was to treat the open-ended responses as qualitative data solely, the responses were usually so brief that the decision was made to quantify those results as well. Each response was then coded as a physical, social, emotional, identity/personal, and/or career/educational development reason. As necessary, responses were coded as indicative of more than one theme. For example, "I participate to be with friends and to stay in shape" was coded as indicative of social and physical development. Longer responses that only reflected one underlying theme, however, were counted as simply one reason. For instance, "I participate to make new friends and show school spirit" would count as one social reason. Once all responses were coded, the numbers of reasons in each category were counted and percentages were calculated. Separate analyzes were conducted for the sport and non-sport participation questions.

Analysis of Interview Data

Following the framework of the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998), the interview transcripts were also read several times in order to get a sense of possible themes. As the interview transcripts were read after the questionnaire data had been analyzed, the researcher looked for possible similarities and differences in responses. In addition, the guiding questions of this study were used when reading the interview transcripts. In considering what EAP meant to the participants, the researcher looked at their responses relating to a wide variety of issues. Examples of such issues include what the participants believed they received from such involvement overall, how the participants felt they had changed through their extracurricular activities, and what role participants thought that EAP played in the lives of high school students in general.

Findings

Qualitative and Quantitative Results from the Questionnaire Data

Question #1: What processes initiate and sustain girls' EAP? None of the high school girls' responses indicated ways in which they had initially become involved in extracurricular activities. Their responses did, however, indicate why they stayed involved in sports and non-sports activities. The reasons cited were usually very similar for both types of extracurricular activities. One logical difference was that those in sports often said they stayed involved because of physical reasons, such as "*to stay in shape*", while these reasons were not given for participation in non-sport activities.

The open-ended responses for why girls participated in activities ranged from social to emotional to personal to physical reasons. Sample responses included " *to meet new people*," "*to be involved*," and "*like being on a team*" in terms of social development. Statements referring to emotional self-regulation and self-esteem, such as "*sports are activities of leisure and relief*", "*it gives me confidence to do anything. I gain strength and self-esteem,*" and *"it's something to be good at"* were considered evidence for emotional development. Comments such as "*I like them*," "*I love sports – sports is my life,*" and "*it gives me a chance to learn something new*" indicated identity/ personal development. Responses that related to physical development included such statements as "*to be physically fit,*" and "*for the exercise*".

The most popular reasons for participating in extracurricular activities were personal. Fifty-three percent of the non-sport responses and 42.7% of the sport responses indicated personal/identity reasons. The next most common reasons were social (29.7%) for the non-sport responses and physical (30.7%) for the sports responses. For the percentages of responses in all themes for the sport and non-sport activities, see Table 1.

Question #2: What processes explain how EAP affects girls' career and educational development?. There were not many responses that directly indicated the high school girls believed their career/educational development was being affected by EAP. Only 7.6% of the non-sport responses and 4.1% of the sport responses concerned career/educational development. The few non-sports responses related to those aspects were usually concerned with college applications, such as "*need for college applications*" and "*need for scholarships*." Similarly, the sports responses that suggested career or educational development usually indicated a hope for either a professional sports career or a college scholarship. For instance, one fifteen year-old

tenth grader commented that, "*I hope to go to college for it*" whereas an eighteen year-old twelfth grader stated that, "*I enjoy these things & hope to make a career out of them.*"

Question #3: What does EAP mean overall to young women? The survey questions were problematic in answering this question. The high school girls were asked to say *why* they participated, not what their activities meant to them. As stated previously, the girls participated for social, emotional, personal, physical, and career/educational reasons. More complex insights into the meanings that young women give EAP are contained in the following section regarding the interview data.

Qualitative Findings from the Interviews

Question #1: What processes initiate and sustain girls' EAP?

Parental/Family Encouragement. Family and friends often played an important role in initiating girls' involvement in extracurricular activities. Betsy and Elizabeth related that their parents registered them when they were small children for tumbling (a form of gymnastics) and soccer respectively; Kerry remembered her father enrolling her in a summer camp during elementary school. Bonnie explained how she began playing softball in the third grade after attending her older brother's little league games. *"I watched him play a season and I kept asking my parents I want to play, I want to play... So the following year, they found a softball league that I could play on."*

Family and Friends Encouragement. In some cases, family activities interacted with other people or forces in the environment to propel girls towards participation. Christina explained how the influence of her family and her friends combined to promote her involvement in basketball. She related how her first memory of playing basketball was when her father held

her up when she was small in order for her to "dunk" the ball. She elaborated that when basketball tryouts began, she and some close friends decided it would be fun to do that together.

Maria related how her family's involvement in church activities had inadvertently exposed her to the bass guitar and how that in turn fostered her involvement in the school orchestra. *" I wasn't that interested in it until one of my sister's friends from the choir. They just got me like here, why don't you play on the bass? ... I guess they didn't have anybody else to play so they just asked me... And from then on I just wanted to learn more."*

Teacher Encouragement. Teachers were also important figures in motivating girls to get involved in activities. Maria elaborated that although her family's church choir attendance sparked her interest in the bass guitar, the orchestra teacher's encouragement resulted in her joining the orchestra. Christina described how a teacher motivated her to apply for membership in the National Honor Society. *" At first, it's like they send a packet to your teachers to give to you. And I wasn't going to do it, at first. But then the teacher came back around to me and was like "Christina, you have to fill out the packet, are you going to do it?" And so I decided to do it that day".* For Betsy, a teacher was important in initiating her involvement in her favorite sport, softball. *"My 4th grade teacher was a softball coach ... and so she encouraged every girl in the class to be in softball... And I had never thought of it until she encouraged it and from there just loved it and I kept playing."*

Personal Initiative. Marsha was unique as she initiated her high school involvement in a community service club on her own. She did not recall the encouragement of others, but instead her own desire to be involved and participate in a worthwhile activity. *"I just thought ... I should probably try to get involved in high school ... So that's when I decided to look into "Words, not Weapons" and... it grabbed my attention probably because they went to nursing*

homes like on Valentine's Day and ... I enjoy helping other people... So I started going to the meetings."

Once involvement was begun, respondents conveyed that personal, social, and emotional factors primarily sustained their EAP.

Enjoyable. In terms of personal reasons for remaining involved, participants' responses indicated that enjoyment of the activity was essential. All participants remembered their activities as being something that they liked or even loved doing. Emily recalled that *"Most of my heart went into the sports, it did. Because I love that... it's what I love to do."*

Identity Development. The personal reasons respondents provided sometimes suggested that the opportunities for identity exploration (Eriksson, 1963) that EAP provided helped sustain involvement. For example, Bonnie remembered, "*Playing tennis... was a way for me as an individual to stand out. I enjoyed academics, but I wasn't going to be valedictorian and... that kind of thing... so sports was kind of my way to have an identity."* Elizabeth's remarks help explain this process of identification more fully. When asked why she "loved" sports, Elizabeth replied, "*I really like the whole fact of keeping in shape kind of thing...(I'm) kind of a health conscious person."* Here Elizabeth's personal reasons for participation are being incorporated into her identity. She sees herself as a health conscious person who loves sports. In turn, this growing sense of identification helps sustain her involvement: sports participation becomes a means of self-expression. *"It's just what I love to do. And that's where I spend my time."*

Sense of Belonging Fostered. Participants also remembered the importance of social interactions through EAP. The young women spoke about how they had liked making new friends and/or feeling that they "belonged" through their EAP. Kerry explains how this process occurred for her with her summer camp experiences, stating that, "*The first time I ever went*

there ... I didn't know anybody... and by the time this summer I knew everybody... and...I really felt like I'd gotten a place there."

Love of Team Atmosphere. The sports participants related that the social opportunity to be part of a team helped sustain their involvement as well. For example, Elizabeth remembered, "*That's the part about it that I loved the most... I loved being part of a team."* Betsy 's recollections are similar. "*I liked the team aspect – that was always a huge part of it. I loved the feeling of teammates supporting each other."*

Love of competition in sports. In addition to a fondness for teamwork, the adult women recalled competition as instrumental in sustaining participation. Bonnie reflected that she had enjoyed competition since her third grade softball team. Betsy laughingly reflected that when she was in high school, to lose "*was not even acceptable."* Both recalled a desire to always improve their athletic skills. For instance, Betsy remembered, "*I was always wanting to be getting better, ... or just be at the top of my game."*

Emotional Outlet. The two professional women also spoke about sports as being an "*outlet*" for their emotions. Betsy recalled that "*One thing that softball was for me was like an outlet, a place where I was angry, where I could cry, or where I could be so excited I would jump up and down. That was where I let go of everything and expressed all those emotions."* Bonnie expressed herself similarly, "*It's kind of an outlet for you...you can yell or scream in an appropriate way in team sports or get really aggressive playing sports whereas in other -- like in academic settings -- you can't do that."*

Made Me Feel Good About Myself. Although the previous three themes were unique to sports participation, there were common themes across activities. One commonality was that respondents recalled participating because it "*made me feel good*". The former service

participants in particular remembered this aspect. For example, Marsha argued that her service club involvement *"was a rewarding experience most of all."* Another instance was when Maria claimed that service participation "*just makes you feel good. Like being able to help out, it's like all right, I actually made a difference."*

Respondents often alluded to how this "feeling good" about themselves because of EAP promoted self-esteem and self-confidence. For example, Betsy believed that sports "*helped my self-esteem. Because I always felt great about that area."* Likewise, Bonnie recalled ,"*that's just an area of my life that I did well and felt like that was an area where I could just be myself."*

Stress Relief. An additional reason that respondents believed they continued EAP was because it helped them cope with stress. For example, Marsha recalled, "*When school became overwhelming, I just always knew that... the Words not Weapons is something to fall back on and it relieved stress that I might have been having."* Another example is that Betsy saw sports as providing a break from the rigors of school. *"It was a great time away from school 'cause I did want to do well in school... and so it was 3 hours that I focused on so intensely that school didn't even matter in those 3 hours."*

Emotional Healing. Unlike the other participants, Kerry saw her own need for emotional healing as sustaining her involvement in an activity. She explained that there had been drug abuse within her family and that student council provided her with the opportunity to share her experiences with younger children. *"I went and spoke to middle school students twice a year in the health classes about the effects that drug use has on the family...I felt like by speaking to those kids about the effects of drug use on the family, I felt like I got over it... And I think I helped other people."*

Question #2: What processes explain how EAP affects girls' career and educational development?

The women cited a multitude of ways in which their career and educational development had been affected through EAP. One common element was that none of the undergraduates believed that their EAP had affected their decisions to attend college; they all argued they had planned on attending college anyway. Another commonality was that the two adult women spoke of ways in which their career or educational paths were altered as a result of their sports participation.

Motivation for School. One common perception was that extracurricular activities were motivators for school attendance. Maria's comments reflect this. "*There's all these classes like math, English... Only if you're going to be like an English major or something would that be your interest. But I mean, it wasn't mine. So you know it gave me time to do something that I really liked... I was motivated to go to school because of that. Because then I would get to do the things that I liked to do.*" Bonnie's recollections are similar. "*I was bored with academics in high school. Couldn't wait to go to college. So I wouldn't have seen high school as a positive experience otherwise. Sports kept my interest going.*"

Increased Time Management Skills. Two former sports participants, Elizabeth and Christina, felt that sports had forced them to use their time well. In turn, this focus helped them to achieve higher grades during high school. Christina explained this process by saying that, "*Once I got home from practice...I had to do my homework... and I knew that in order to play sports I had to keep my grades up.*" She elaborated that to keep her grades high, "*If I needed to*

go to study hall or tutoring, I went. I wouldn't just sit in class all day. If I didn't understand I would ask questions."

Fostered Interest in Certain Classes. Another way in which EAP influenced educational development was through its impact on respondents' educational interests and decisions. Maria, Marsha, and Elizabeth related that their participation influenced the high school and college courses they choose. For instance, Maria said the reason why she was taking a college jazz music class was because her orchestra involvement had increased her interest in music. In Elizabeth's case, this influence was not necessarily positive. Elizabeth admitted that her over-involvement in sports prevented her from taking more difficult classes during high school. "*I probably could've taken harder classes but because of the time management I didn't. I took more handbell choir and stuff like that...Because I could've been taking an AP course that would've given me credit here whereas I decided not to.*"

Influential in College Choice. Betsy, Christina, and Kerry believed that their EAP affected their decisions regarding which college to attend. Betsy recalled that one reason why she chose her undergraduate institution was because of the school's popular sports teams. Christina argued her Urban League attendance helped her identify realistic college options. Kerry believed that her service involvement helped her be admitted to college and even win scholarships. "*I don't think that I would've been accepted to school had it not been for my activities and for my community service and I have some scholarships because of them.*"

Confidence Builder for Career and Educational Goals. The women also cited ways in which they had gained skills, confidence, and self-esteem that impacted their career and educational development. For instance, Betsy felt she learned to believe in herself through sports. "*I always felt like I could do whatever I wanted in sports. And I could work hard enough*

to be as good as I wanted. So yes, I generally think if I want to get an A on the tests, yeah, I will get one if I choose to work that hard. So yeah, I think that same way in other things." Likewise, Christina gained confidence. *"In high school, ...I could shoot, but I wasn't that good. And a friend of mine... helped me learn ... That boosted my confidence in myself when it came to basketball ... Because I didn't think I was going to be able to accomplish that, but with Tonya's help, I was. So I thought if I could accomplish that, I could accomplish anything."*

Marsha argued that the confidence she received through her service club involvement was pivotal, stating that *"it has given me confidence and my major is broadcasting."* Marsha elaborated that through working with all kinds of people in her service club, she had learned how to communicate well with others. This ability to communicate well with other people then gave her confidence for a broadcasting career, where good communication skills are essential.

Instilled Values and Attitudes. In addition to gaining self-confidence, respondents felt they received values through EAP that in turn influenced – or would influence -- their career development. Betsy sees this impact upon her own career path. *"Seeing that girls could do the same kinds of things in sports that boys could do I think played a part in me not seeing men and women in traditional roles. And so that may've had a big impact on me getting a Ph.D. and deciding to have a career."* When Kerry reflects upon the impact of her summer camp experience, she believes that process will occur in her future. *" I think that has impacted more so who I am than what I want to do with it... But it's definitely changed who I am... like it's given me values and things that will help shape what I end up doing."*

Direction to Career Choice. Instead of an indirect effect, some participants felt that their EAP had a direct influence upon their career choices. Bonnie and Elizabeth believed that their sports participation directed them to particular career paths. Elizabeth thought that her love of

sports had combined with her love of service activities to direct her towards a career as a personal trainer. For Bonnie, her sports experiences directed her away from medicine and into teaching. *"It gave me kind of a hunger for a challenge... I originally looked at medicine as a challenge... But when I started observing with a doctor ... I realized there was more monotony in medicine and... teaching looked more challenging...With the medicine, it was more of a routine thing... But with teaching, it was always different. With every kid, you do something different."*

Increased Awareness of Career Options. A final way in which EAP influenced career development was through increasing respondents' awareness of potential options. Christina believed that her FBLA experience strengthened her interest in accounting and computer as well as increased her awareness of career options. *"It let me know that there's a lot of things that I can do. I'm not limited just to accounting – there's other things too, like you could go to DeVry* (a technical school)."

Question #3: What does EAP mean to young women?

In considering what EAP meant to the participants, responses that reflected participants' overall feelings and perceptions were considered. Overall, the participants felt that EAP was very beneficial. The degree of impact varied widely, however.

Preventative. Christina believed that EAP served a protective function for teens by preventing feelings of isolation and distress. *"If you work together as a group, instead of just being by yourself, you gain more friends, and your self-esteem comes up. Instead of just sitting on the sidelines wondering."* She also thought that it helped teens avoid problematic behaviors, such as having premarital sex. *"Just kind of if they don't do anything, they have kids. If they*

keep active, they don't have time. ... because I never got in trouble, never once got in trouble in high school."

Personal Enhancement. The participants also suggested ways in which students' development was enhanced through EAP as Holland and Andre (1987) theorize. They spoke about how EAP provided opportunities, which made you more "*well-rounded.*" Christina suggests this by saying that, *"Not too much sports, or the other programs really...changed me. It made me more proud of myself, and more confident... Like more icing on the cake. Added more to me."*

Changed Self-Concepts. Unlike Christina, other participants believed that their EAP had really changed them. For instance, Marsha argued that service involvement "*changes your life.*" Betsy thought that her self-esteem and liberal gender role attitudes had increased through sports. Bonnie felt that she became more confident and less timid by playing sports. *"It's taken away sort of the timidness that I might have otherwise, across my whole being."*

Respondents often communicated that they had learned much about themselves through their EAP. For instance, Betsy explained that through sports, "*I learned about myself a lot. How I could work for something, how hard I would work if something was important to me... I learned I felt good about myself."* Maria was surprised to learn through her orchestra involvement that she enjoyed challenges. *"I don't think that before I had ever been challenged that much... So it made me see that this is something that I liked to do and it's interesting and I like it because it gives me a challenge."*

Incorporation into Identity. Kerry, Elizabeth, Bonnie, and Betsy spoke of ways in which their EAP had become part of their adult identities. Kerry and Elizabeth saw their EAP as part of who they were. For example, Kerry recalled her summer camp experience as "*It is a huge, huge*

piece of how I am who I am... like how I shaped to be this person." Bonnie related that, "*Intense concentration…I have to have that in my life – whether that's working on a kind of academic project ... Or hitting a racquetball or tennis ball...That intense concentration, I have realized, is part of my identity."* Bonnie also felt that staying active in sports remained part of who she was. When asked to describe herself, Betsy said that, "*Definitely one of the 1st things that I would say, and not just because we're sitting here, is that I'm into sports or I'm athletic. It's still a huge part of my life."*

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the types of processes that initiate and sustain young women's involvement in extracurricular activities, what types of processes influence young women's career/educational development through extracurricular activities, and what EAP means overall to young women. Although there were some difficulties with using open-ended survey responses from the high school girls, the study generally was able to answer its questions and reveal some important findings.

One unexpected result was how similar thoughts and wordings occurred across age groups. One example is that Maria, a college undergraduate, and Bonnie, an adult woman, described EAP as having served the same function: it gave them an interest in school when academics did not. Another instance is that a high school sports participant described sports as "*activities of leisure and relief*" whereas Marsha, a college undergraduate, remembered that her community service club "*relieved stress.*"

Despite the overall consistency in themes across the age groups, one theme disappeared over time. Although the high school girls frequently gave physical reasons for sports

participation, the college-age and adult women seldom did. One explanation for this may be that such reasoning became enmeshed in the sports participants' identities over time. For instance, a college undergraduate, Elizabeth, claimed that sports were something that she loved to do because she was a "*health conscious person*." In comparison, the two adult women, Betsy and Bonnie, did not say they participated in sports for health or physical reasons. Instead, they simply stated that ongoing participation in sports was important to them.

Another difference in the three groups regarded the pattern of responses relating to career/educational development. The high school girls seldom said their participation was sustained for career or educational considerations. The college women spoke of ways in which they anticipated that their careers would be influenced by their EAP and sometimes struggled to say how their educational development had been influenced. The adult women, however, spoke easily about how their career and educational development was influenced by EAP. These differences reflect the time of life for each group of women. The high school students were just beginning the career exploration process, the college undergraduates were in the midst of choosing careers, and the adult women had already begun careers.

The findings regarding what processes sustain students' involvement in extracurricular activities are also developmental in nature. Participants' responses indicated that such activities were helping them to negotiate the developmental tasks of adolescence. According to Erikson (1963), adolescents need to figure out who they are apart from their immediate families. This task was reflected in part by responses that indicated they learned about themselves, or realized something was part of their identity, through their EAP. Erikson also recognizes the peer group as supporting students in this task. This need was reflected when respondents provided social

reasons for their involvement, such as they liked being part of a sports team or welcomed the opportunity to make new friends.

A related finding is that women remained involved in activities because such participation helped meet emotional and personal needs they had as adolescents. Participants talked about how their self-esteem and self-confidence increased through their involvement. Kerry spoke frankly of how it helped her work through her feelings about the drug abuse which had occurred within her family. Some respondents also conveyed how they had learned about themselves and what they wanted to do through their EAP. In contrast to Brown and Gilligan's (1992) research which suggests that girls lose their 'voice" during adolescence, the sense of self was sustained in part through EAP for this group of respondents.

Although the findings indicate that EAP is self-sustaining once begun, parents and educators should realize that girls might need encouragement to initially get involved. With the exception of Marsha, the college undergraduates and adult women related how their parents, families, and teachers played important roles in the processes through which they began participation. Christina even admitted that she did not intend to participate in an honor society until her teacher prodded her to do so.

The findings also indicate that the processes of initiating involvement begin very early, especially for sports participants. All sports participants recalled ways in which their parents helped them begin sports participation as children. In order for extracurricular activities to be truly open to all students, encouragement in high school is not sufficient. Instead, intervention programs should assist families in helping children to become active early on or children may lack the skills necessary to participate.

Students deserve equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities because involvement may promote career and educational development. Respondents communicated ways in which high school EAP affected their educational choices, including choices of classes, majors, and degrees. Some participants saw direct relationships between their EAP and the careers they pursued; others felt they internalized values and attitudes from their EAP that in turn affected their career decisions.

Overall, respondents viewed EAP as beneficial for high school students' development. They believed that extracurricular activities complemented academics. Marsha and Betsy saw it as a break or a form of stress relief from school. Bonnie and Maria credited it with increasing their motivation to go to school, similar to Marsh's (1992) ideas about how EAP increases students' "commitment to school."

Although this study's findings are usually positive regarding EAP, too much participation can adversely affect young women. One recent study discovered a trend for the most highly involved students to have lower standardized test scores (Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999). Likewise, Elizabeth, a former member of a state champion soccer team, admitted that she had lacked enough time to take high school advanced placement classes. Such a pattern of results indicates that students need to balance academics and EAP.

Despite the strengths of the findings, the study has important limitations. The first limitation is that the open-ended survey questions were problematic for use in a qualitative study. Although participants could theoretically write as much as they wanted, most responses were very brief. Because of such brevity, these responses usually lacked depth. Future work should include interviews, instead of survey questions, with high school girls in order to obtain more comprehensive viewpoints.

Lastly, as is typical in qualitative research, these findings do not automatically apply to all young people or even all young women (Merriam, 1998). They only represent the young women who spoke. At the same time, the findings do suggest processes through which young women's personal, educational, and vocational development is enhanced through extracurricular activity participation.

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Table 1

Table 1. Percentages of Responses in Each Theme for the Sports and Non-Sport Participation Questions. (N = 156).

	Non-Sport Responses	Sports Responses
Social	29.7%	14.6%
Emotional	9.5%	7.8%
Identity/Personal	53.2%	42.7%
Physical	0.0%	30.7%
Career/Educational	7.6%	4.1%

Appendix A

Interview protocol for adult women participants

1. What sports have you been involved in?
2. How did you get involved in those sports?
3. What are your first memories of sports?
4. What did you learn from sports, aside from the rules and skills of the games?
5. What has been the most meaningful aspect of playing sports for you? Or has been so far?
6. What role has sports played in your identity, or sense of who you are?
7. What kind of role did sports play in your identity, in 1) middle school 2) high school and 3) college?
8. How did sports impact your career goals, if at all?
9. Were there ways you think that being a girl affected sports for you B i.e., what you could play and what you couldn=t?
10. How does sports continue to be a part of your life, if at all?
11. How does sports continue to impact your life, if at all?
12. How would you describe yourself now? If someone asked you, who are you? What would you say?
13. How has sports impacted that description of yourself, of your identity, if at all?
14. Basic demographic data: age, occupation, birth order, family makeup

Appendix B

Interview protocol used with first-year college undergraduates

First read verbal script and obtain written consent.

1. You were chosen to participate in this study because of your participation in non-academic, i.e., extracurricular activities, during high school.
In high school, what formal extracurricular activities X such as band, or varsity sports, or newspaper staff or service activities -- were you involved in?

2. (If more than one activity) which activity do you think you were most involved in?

3. How did you became involved in (particular activity)? (Probe: What drew you to that activity? What things made you focus on that activity more than other activities?)

4. What is your earliest memory of being involved in (particular activity)?

5. Can you tell me about something or a day/time/incident/ in (particular activity) that stands out to you?

6. (Time permitting; 20 minutes or less in) What was a typical day/practice/rehearsal/meeting in (particular activity) like?

7. What effect do you think being involved in (particular activity) had on you personally?

Probes: What kind of changes do you see in yourself b/c of your involvement in (particular activity)?
How do you think about yourself differently b/c of your involvement in (particular activity)?

What things do you think you still see in yourself because of it?
What are some values you think you took from it?
How do you feel your personality or values changed as a result of your involvement in (particular activity)?

8. What role do you think your participation in (particular activity) had on some big decisions you've had to make, like where to go to college or even whether to go to college?

Probes:
What kind of effect do you think your involvement in (particular activity) had on decisions you had to make in high school? (Like what classes to take)

How do you think it has influenced what you expect to study in college? What kind of relation, if any, do you see between your involvement in (particular activity) and your educational plans?

How do you think it has influenced the careers you re considering? What kind of relation, if any, do you see between your involvement in (particular activity) and your career goals?

9. Overall, what kinds of things do you think you got out of it? Like, friends you met or accomplishments you ve had? What are you most grateful for having experienced?

10. If involved in a service activity, what do you think you got out of your involvement in _____ service activity?

11. (Time permitting, at least 20 minutes to go) If involved in other activities, what do you think you got out of your involvement in _____? In _____?

12. Some people would say that time spent in high school extracurricular activities like (particular activity) is a waste of time. What would you say to them?

13. If you someday have a daughter, would you encourage her to be involved in extracurricular activities like _____?

14. (Time permitting, at least 10 minutes to go) What extracurricular activities are you involved in now at ASU?

15. (IF some) What drew you to those activities? How do you think that=s helped you in college?
(IF NO college activities) What has kept you from being involved in college extracurricular activities?

16. (5 minutes or more left) Now would you mind completing this mini survey about your background? There are just a few questions, and that will be the end of the interview. (Hand over mini survey)

Mini Survey questions:
1. Age
2. Year in college
3. How would you describe your racial/ethnic group heritage?
4. How would you describe your family in terms of income or class status?
5. What was your place in your family X were you the oldest child, middle child, youngest child?
6. What is your marital status (e.g., single)?

17. (*Once survey is completed*) Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?